

To the Frome Urban District Council.

GENTLEMEN,—

I regret having to report for the year 1898 the largest mortality since 1893; with an infantile mortality considerably greater than in that year, and slightly more than the exceptionally large number of 1897.

With no excessive variations of temperature, the rainfall was much below the average throughout the greater portion of the year, and a certain degree of cold prevailed until after Midsummer. I append the monthly rainfall:—

January ...	1'02 inches.	May ...	4'42 inches.	September ...	1'20 inches.
February ...	2'46 „	June ...	2'54 „	October ...	4'30 „
March ...	'94 „	July ...	'35 „	November ...	3'94 „
April ...	1'89 „	August ...	2'15 „	December ...	4'63 „

A considerable number of new houses have been completed and occupied during the year, and I have carefully considered how far this circumstance would justify an assumed increase in the population of the Urban District. It will be found that most of the inhabitants are drawn from the older portions of the town, and are in many cases the younger, (but matured) members of other families. For obvious reasons, their birth-rate is somewhat higher, but the family is very rarely numerous, and in most instances decidedly small. It should also be remembered that building operations were in progress throughout a large portion of the decade 1882—1891, and the census returns then, showed a practically stationary population. There has been no increase in the School accommodation for some years past, and, even with free education, there does not appear to be any such pressure on the existing provision for scholars, as would be the case with a considerable addition to population. Bearing in mind that the people generally are now better housed than formerly, as well as better fed and clothed, I have thought it fittest to adopt a conservative estimate, and, allowing for the increased employment in the building trades, and some other industries, I have prepared the vital statistics upon the basis of a population of 9,700, as against 9,613, the number returned at the census of 1891.

The registered births numbered 249, viz:—137 Males and 112 Females, an increase of 34 compared with the previous year, but still 14 fewer than in 1896. Only 5 of these were illegitimate births, —the lowest number for many years. The birthrate equals 25'67 per thousand, as against 22'36 in 1897.

Two severe epidemics made their influence felt. Influenza in the early months caused a large amount of illness, and was followed in May and June by a widespread epidemic of measles. The low temperatures which then prevailed caused each disease to be more than usually fatal, and Measles, having been almost entirely absent for many years, a large number of susceptible children had accumulated, and maintained the prevalence of the disease. Early in June I found it necessary to recommend the closing of the schools, and they remained closed for three weeks, by which time the epidemic had spent its force. As more deaths, suffering, and inconvenience are caused by Measles than by all the other Zymotic diseases, I would advise the Council to include this as a notifiable infectious disease.

One case of Enteric Fever occurred in February, and proved fatal. There was no notification of Diphtheria, but two cases of Puerperal Fever were reported to me. A few cases of Diarrhoea occurred, and one death was certified as due to this cause. In the early months several scattered cases of scarlatina were notified, and isolated cases were reported at intervals, up to the end of June. Some of these were removed to the Isolation Hospital, and others were dealt with at their homes. It is possible that some of the later cases may have been really Measles, which, when severe, sometimes causes desquamation, as in Scarlatina, but it seemed advisable in these cases to adopt the precautions usual in the latter disease. Erysipelas once more has returned a large number of cases, an increase of ten upon the previous year.

The total number of cases of infectious disease notified was 38 as follows:—

Scarlatina ...	...	18	Puerperal Fever ...	...	2
Enteric Fever ...	...	1	Erysipelas ...	...	17

In one instance the notification was made by the parents, but the general public continues to ignore the obligation to report infectious disease. I must again express my appreciation of the assistance rendered me by the medical practitioners of the town, in carrying out the provisions of the Notification Act.

The Registered deaths number 194, viz:—100 Males, and 94 Females, a considerable increase on the figures of 1897, when they were 76 and 73 respectively. I append tables in which they are classified, in respect of time, age, and the cause of death:—

(I).

	1898.	1897.	1896.
January, February, and March ...	52	57	38
April, May, and June ...	65	35	35
July, August, and September ...	36	29	32
October, November, and December ...	41	28	55
	<u>194</u>	<u>149</u>	<u>160</u>

(II).

	1898.	1897.	1896.
(1) Under one year ...	36	35	26
(2) From 1 to 5 years ...	17	10	5
(3) „ 5 to 15 „ ...	4	3	7
(4) „ 15 to 25 „ ...	4	6	1
(5) „ 25 to 60 „ ...	44	28	43
(6) Over 60 years ...	89	67	78
	<u>194</u>	<u>149</u>	<u>160</u>

(III).

				MALES.	FEMALES.	TOTAL.
Zymotic Diseases	...	...	...	8	6	14
Tubercular Diseases	...	...	...	12	6	18
Malignant	...	...	...	4	9	13
Apoplexy	...	...	...	5	6	11
Diseases of Nervous System	...	...	...	6	9	15
" Circulatory System	...	...	...	10	12	22
" Respiratory Organs	...	...	...	8	4	12
" Digestive	...	...	...	9	5	14
" Excretory	...	...	...	7	4	11
Premature Birth	...	...	...	2	6	8
Age	...	...	...	16	13	29
Injuries	...	...	...	4	4	8
All other causes	...	...	...	9	10	19
				100	94	194

(IV).

Deaths from Zymotic Diseases—

Enteric Fever	...	...	1	Diarrhœa	...	...	1
Measles	...	...	12				

There were also three deaths due to Influenza, and two to Erysipelas, but these are not taken into account in the calculation of the Zymotic death-rate.

During the year twelve persons not usually resident in the town died within the Urban District, ten in the Workhouse, and one in the Cottage Hospital. The various death-rates on the estimated population of 9,700 are :—

General	...	...	20	per 1000 population, against	15'49 in 1897.
Or allowing for the } non-residents	...	...	18'76	"	"
Zymotic	...	...	1'44	"	"
"	...	...	72'11	"	deaths
Infantile	...	...	144'57	"	births
"	...	...	185'56	"	deaths

Average for England and Wales, (1897)—

General	...	...	17'4	per 1000 population.
Zymotic	...	...	2'18	"
Infantile	...	...	148	" births.

The increased number of deaths of infants and young children is chiefly due to premature births, which account for six more than in 1897, while the measles epidemic was responsible for many of them. Two other age divisions also showing large increases are "25 to 60," and "over 60," and the excess may, I think, be accounted for by Influenza and its sequelæ, combined with the depressing effect of the prolonged low temperatures, of the first six months of the year, when most of these deaths occurred. One person had reached the age of 90 years, fourteen were between 80 and 90, and forty between 70 and 80 at death.

The general Sanitary work of the year has again been carried out in a manner which must command approval. All matters requiring attention in connection with infectious disease have been promptly dealt with by your Officers, and the cleansing and disinfection of invaded premises accomplished without unnecessary delay. The results have been eminently satisfactory, for in only one instance did extension of the disease occur, and then before the nature of the disease was first recognised.

On one occasion the stench from the Sewage Works was the subject of complaint. Free flushing of the sewers usually suffices to prevent this, but the difficulty in applying a permanently effective remedy does not yet seem to have been solved. A large number of hand-flushed closets are still in use, and they must render the task more difficult. Surely the time has now come when the Council should insist on adequate flushing cisterns being everywhere installed.

The Scavenging of the town continues to be carried out in a manner to give general satisfaction.

The Public Water Supply has been excellent, both in respect of quantity, and organic purity. Three samples from private wells have been submitted to me for analysis. I found them to vary much in quality, but none could be described as good. Each of these samples seemed to contain a large proportion of subsoil water, with an excess of combined nitrogen and chlorides. I must again state that in any town a subsoil well is not a satisfactory source of supply, and may at any time become a source of disease.

I continued to visit the various Bakehouses of the town, and am gratified to report a general desire on the part of the proprietors, to maintain them in a clean and wholesome condition.

Four patients were received for treatment at the Isolation Hospital, and though the cases were but few, it was of considerable service in each instance, effective isolation being difficult at the patient's homes. The Hospital still contains but two wards, i.e., it provides only for one infectious disease at a time, and I cannot regard this as sufficient. The exemption clauses of the new Vaccination Act have been largely taken advantage of, some eighty certificates having been granted, and it now becomes more than ever necessary to at once isolate any initial case of variola that may occur.

Allow me in conclusion, Gentlemen, to express my thanks for the courtesy and assistance I have received from you and the staff,

I remain,

Your obedient Servant,

FREDERICK PARSONS.

FROME, February 6th, 1899.

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Urban District Council.



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